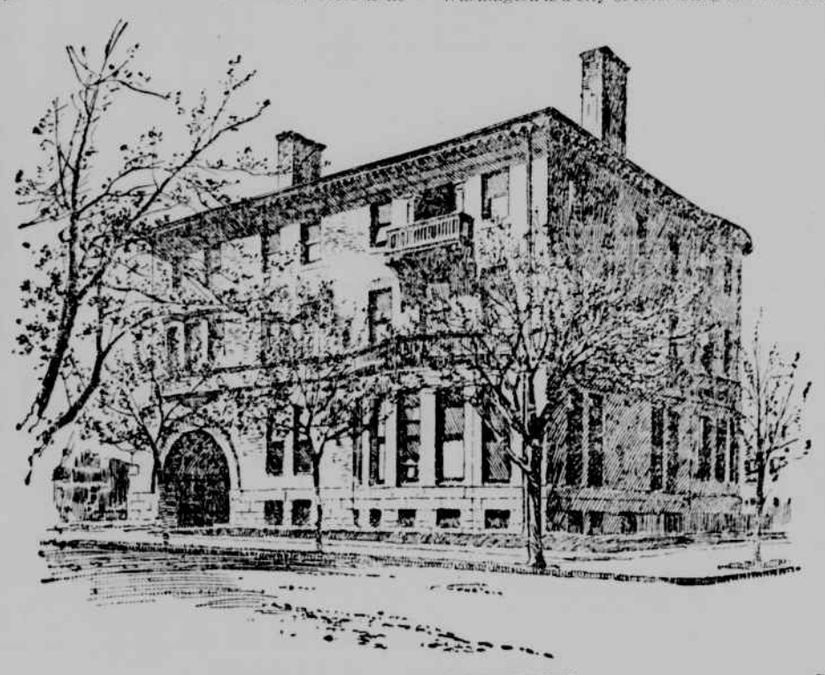
WASHINGTON HOUSES.

BEAUTIES AND PECULIARITIES OF SOME HOMES IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL.

A CITY OF BROAD STREETS WITH ROOM FOR FINE DWELLINGS—THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING MORE THAN ONE FACADE—WHAT HAS BEEN DONE WITH BRICK IN WASHINGTON—UTILITY AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARM.

Washington, February 7.

One of the familiar criticisms aimed at American architecture is that it has no American roots. The Colonial style was borrowed from the classic past, via England, and even if it had been indigenous its admirers would still have to admit that it is not the style of the United States today, nor the style to which we propose to permanently attach ourselves as time goes on. The American style of architecture, when it has been invented, seems likely to be the most eclectic in story. In the mean time, however, there is no



HOUSE OF MR. W. J. BOARDMAN.

city of importance in America without its peculiar character, its architectural physiognomy. Boston has it, so has Philadelphia, so even has Chicago and many another Western town; and Washington has it in very striking measure. It is the more remarkable, too, in the case of this southern city, because the semi-Colonial characteristics which once marked the place have long since retired into the background, and for years a nondescript style of architecture reigned in their place. But some ten or fifteen years ago Washington began to feel the effects of a kind

ENTRANCE AND BAY WINDOW OF MR. WHITTEMORE'S HOUSE.

of renaissance, which has increased in momentum as the concentration of social life in the capital has induced people to build their homes where once they were accustomed to rent them. The pure physical delight, too, of spending the cold months of the year under balmy skies has inspired the erection of elaborate houses to which the owners can return winter after winter.

Various conditions, in addition to those of a social or climatic nature, have contributed to the rebuilding of Washington. It is a city of considerable area, and though there are special neighborhoods, as in Massachusetts-ave. and about Dupont Circle, in which many of the fashionable householders have pitched their tents, it is, nevertheless, possible to find acres and acres of building sites scattered all over the northwestern section of the city upon which a man can build without losing caste. In New-York the fashionable area is so small that land sells at a fabulous price per front foot. In Washington there are so many available and even highly desirable sites that they are not at all extravagant in value and the house-builder can afford to buy land enough for his home, with some to spare. Privileges are given to him also which he cannot have in most large cities. He can with impunity carry projections from his house beyond the building line, constructing bay windows and porches with an indifference to his neighbor's light that in New-York would keep the lawyers busy every working day of the year. It is said, indeed, that the elasticity of the Washington law on this point is appreciated to the last degree. Again and again an owner possessing all the depth back of the building line that he could possibly demand will insist upon his privilege as though in sheer delight at insisting, and there is a case on record where a house was constructed on a set of grotesque angles just because the person to whom the land belonged felt that she could not let a fragment of it go unimproved. She built a house which drove her neighbor to the point of distraction; the neighbor sued and got a verdict, but in the long run that verdict was reversed and the arbitrary proprietress was upheld by the courts. All over Washington the projections over the building line are numerous and picturesque, they provide one source of the city's architectural interest, and at those points which are made by the intersection of streets and avenues at the circles for which the city is remarkable, it is a not uncommon occurrence to find a house planned with startling eccentricity. It is one of the attractions of Washington, however, that architectural eccentricity has not stamped itself upon the broad and stately streets. The same porches, bay windows and stone steps which in a crowded city would prove unbearably inconvenient and sometimes inartistic fall naturally into the wide perspective which the spacious scale of Washington permits.

Washington is a city of interesting architectural vistas. The absence of uniformity to which reference has been made is one of those artistic virtues to which the eye first gets accustomed in a general way and without pausing over the character of this or that departure from precedent. One strolls up one avenue and down another with a consciousness that there is plenty of sky overhead, that the horizon is broken not by a continuous line of monotonous masonry, but by houses placed apart from each other and built with such an irregularity of roof and chimney lines that, for a certain sense of having all the breathing space needed, one feels as though Washington were a suburban town. There is, indeed, a great deal of actual suburban architecture here. The big Colonial mansion of Senator Hale, at the corner of K and Sixteenth sts., is built of substantial material, but it is exactly such a building as might be placed upon a New-England estate. The odd thing about it is that this sort of house is built again and again in Washington, and never seems out of place. Partly this is due to the wide streets, but still more to the fact that with ample space on all four sides of his dwelling, or at least on two or three of the boundaries, a man can have his house designed along individual lines and made so admirable in itself that it simply adds one more note of charm to the general effect of variety and personal taste. The only fixed law seems to be that the taste should be good. If the domestic architecture of Washington were to be summed up in a line, the architecture of the last ten or fifteen years, it would be described as pre-eminently refined. One industrious architect, it is true, has built a number of peculiarly inartistic houses and flung them broadcast over the city, besides filling one entire block with the product of his labors, but these buildings are exceptional. Since the late H. H. Richardson built the Anderson house on the southeast corner of K and Sixteenth sts., there seems to have been a tacit agreement among landowners and architects that they would not exceed a definite measure of restraint and simplicity. It would seem that they worked together in more ways than one. Richardson built the Anderson house in 1882, as a tablet set in the wall proclaims. He built it in brick, and, although Washington had always employed this material in hundreds of her dwellings and has never enjoyed the privilege of having numerous and desirable quarries in her vicinity, she nevertheless followed with special ardor the example set by Richardson, and proceeded to get all the effect out of brick that brick could possibly yield. The Anderson house was the pioneer in a movement which has given the city some of its finest dwellings. Richardson used

SENATOR HALE'S HOUSE.

other material in the Warder palace, on H-st., but that was because he was building a palace and he needed stone for the proper expression of his ideas. Broadly speaking, there are more homes than palaces here, and the use of brick in so many of the houses has intensified this domestic effect, as it might be called. That is to say, the first feeling inspired by the artistic brick houses in Washington is that they must be pleasant places to live in, that their occupants must take comfort in their homes.

One of the most delightful houses is one belonging to Mr. Whittemore and lying just off Dupont Circle. It is irregular in plan and spreads out most unconventionally on the corner lot which it occupies. It is a comparatively low building, too, with a slate roof of striking picturesqueness that the architect made still more attractive through weaving his slates after the manner in which shingles are woven on country roofs. The whole atmosphere of this house is of the country and of the home life associated with rural residences. Besides being in exquisite taste, this Whittemore house lingers in the mind persistently as a perfect place in which to live. Now the homelike charm of its design has been pointed out as the source of this feeling in the beholder, but the design would never have worked out in stone—that would have been anti-climax—and since wood would obviously have been an absurdity in a city like Washington, we see that the employment of brick was in itself a stroke of good judgment, good taste. Such a house as this needed to have a color value, and it was secured by the use of brown or speckled brick, rejected from a great order being filled at the kiln, and set in this building with perfect faith in its delicate warmth and agreeable texture. This faith has borne good fruit in every part of the city and not alone where color has been concerned. Richardson showed what could be done just by the placing of a few patterns in the façade, laying a course or two in herring-bone style or having a limited number of arabesques burned in brick or terra cotta and used as a mason would use carved stone in a wall. The two facades of the Anderson house have their beauty enhanced in this discreet fashion, and Richardson applied the same expedient with brilliant effect in the two houses which he built for Colonel John Hay and Henry Adams at H and Seventeenth sts.

At times the brick has been employed with an admirable blending of utility with architectural charm. There is the house now occupied by Mrs. U. S. Grant and built by Messrs. Hornblower & Marshall. These architects saw an opportunity for making a structural necessity contribute to the beauty of the building, and the bay window at the corner is supported by a quantity of bricks stepped out from the ground line and having the effect of a pyramid cut from apex to base and then inverted. This seems an unremarkable contrivance, but it is this kind of architectural thought that is getting itself expressed every now and then in Washington and making the city a place of original and artistic dwellings. Houses deserving more or less the same praise are to be found in other cities, but the brick house as it is understood here is not often met anywhere else. Take another design by the same men who built Mrs. Grant's house, the quaint little home erected for Mrs. Cameron, the mother of the Senator. Here the architects began by making an experiment similar to that which Harvey Page, the architect of the Whittemore house, made in that production. They hunted up some dark bricks that had been thrown out of a Government contract because there was too much iron in them and they hovered between a purple and blackish brown tone. Set in the Cameron house, above a grassy terrace and with a veranda of dark wood running along the front, these bricks meet the eye as the basis of a composition in

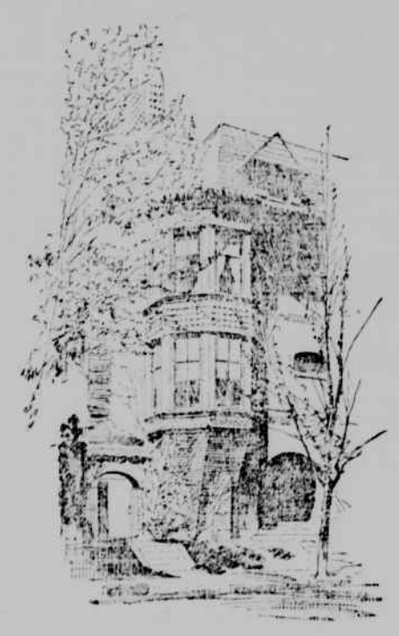
HOUSE OF MRS. MASON.

color which a painter might envy. The architect in Washington is encouraged to try for effects of color by the presence of abundant turf, many trees and a sky that can be Italian even at this time of year. The environment provided by nature for his architecture is a constant invitation to him to range as far afield as he can for new methods of increasing the beauty of his work. His answer to that invitation where brick is concerned has been pointed out. Not satisfied to use brick to the exclusion of all other materials he has gone to copper for some of his most pleasing achievements. Architects elsewhere have done the same thing, but never to the same extent.

There is only one house in New-York, that built in Madison-ave. for Dr. Thomas, by Bruce Price, which relies upon copper for a considerable part of the architectural effect. In Washington there are bay windows past counting, built of copper, and they make a feature which never fails to give pleasure to the stroller through the city. One of these bays is shown in an accompanying illustration. It is the window over the front entrance to the Whittemore house. The form is simple. The copper swells out in graceful lines from the face of the house and is lightly ornamented, the tiny rivet-heads being the most conspicuous details in the decoration. But let the reader imagine this mass of rich, dark metal, gleaming sombrely like bronze, and set gracefully against a wall of tawny bricks, with a roof of slate overhanging the whole. It will be seen at once that an apparently trifling member of the architect's design is of considerable importance in creating the beauty of the latter. There are many such trifles in Washington. Sometimes, in fact, very often, they appear in the shape of a copper bay thrown out from the first or second story of a house that may be red or light brown in its other portions, but is always made more interesting by the metal addition. Sometimes the trifle will be just such a little lantern as is indicated at the side of the Whittemore entrance. This wrought or cast iron decoration, adorning the house and serving a useful purpose, is a frequently recurring feature. It is usual for Washington houses to be entered from the street level, and the hospitable entrance, with its two or three steps, is made the more homelike whenever a place has been given to the dainty lamp-holder of iron and glass.

When the Washington entrance is reached it is tempting to turn from trifles for a moment and glance at some of the striking peculiarities of structure which have been introduced in the city. Richardson was responsible for some of them, and, by-the-way, it is impossible to avoid, apropos of his entrances, a most ingratiating trifle. When a carriage drives down the courtyard of the Warder house, the occupant alights at the edge of a sodded terrace, and has to walk up a path of some ten or twelve feet in length before the porch is gained. Richardson did not want to spoil the appearance of this terrace by a strip of flagging, so he set in its place a row of large, square tiles, some inches apart from one another, as though they were stepping-stones. They are a lovely old rose now, and the grass growing between serves to minimize still further the assertiveness of the path.

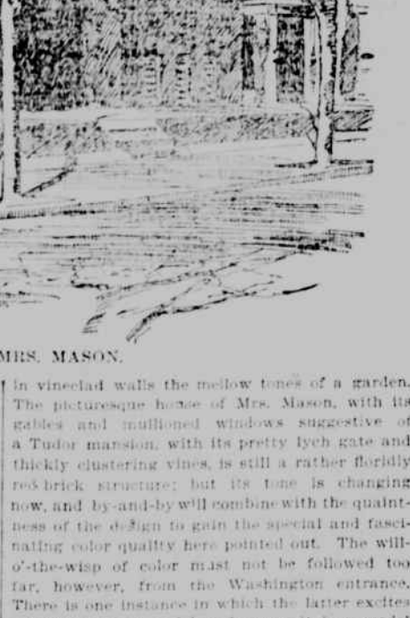
That was the trifle of an architect who had poetic instincts. But in the entrance, to which we now return Richardson showed marked shrewdness. He cut the wall, as in the house of Henry Adams, with a wide and low arch, carrying the actual doorway a couple of feet into the building. Thus a recess was secured which gave more light and shade to the design, and



BAY WINDOW OF HOUSE OF MRS. U. S. GRANT

served to mark the entrance without using up the space that an elaborate portal or vestibule would have required. The same idea has been employed in scores of Washington houses and for convenience and beauty it is a very valuable scheme. The arch is sometimes of stone, but more often brick is the material, and its warm hues add to the grace of the construction. Brick in this town is more subtle in color than is the case in other American cities. Something in the climate seems to affect it and there are houses in every street which send the mind back to neighborhoods about Kensington, Chelsea and Hampstead Heath, where time and a magic at curious odds with London fog have preserved in vine-clad walls the mellow tones of a garden. The picturesque house of Mrs. Mason, with its gables and mullioned windows suggestive of a Tudor mansion, with its pretty lych gate and thickly clustering vines, is still a rather floridly red brick structure; but its tone is changing now, and by-and-by will combine with the quaintness of the design to gain the special and fascinating color quality here pointed out. The will-o'-the-wisp of color must not be followed too far, however, from the Washington entrance. There is one instance in which the latter excites admiration first and last because it is a model of purely constructive beauty. In some ways it is the most remarkable in the city.

This entrance belongs to the house built for Mr. Boardman, at Eighteenth and P sts. It was necessary to arrange the plan with a view to the arrival of visitors on one level, and their reception, after the removal of wraps and coats, on another. As a rule, this is not an easy task. There is bound to be confusion in the passage to and from the dressing-rooms, and down or up from the latter to the main hall and drawing-rooms. In the Boardman house the architects, Messrs. Hornblower & Marshall, hit upon the idea of placing separate staircases at the



A CORNER OF MRS. ANDERSON'S HOUSE.

very threshold. The house is approached through an arch lofty enough to permit a carriage to enter. A vestibule of wood and glass is built just within the arch, and is pierced by a door on both sides, so that a pedestrian can enter, if necessary, at the same time that a carriage is drawn up beside the other entrance. In the house the door gives upon two flights of stairs, side by side. To the right one may walk up to the main hall, on the drawing-room level. To the left the steps go down to the basement, where the dressing-rooms are placed. But here is where the ingenuity of the designers became most interesting. From the hall on which the dressing-rooms open a second flight of steps is gained, and these are carried up, independently of the first flight, to the main hall aforesaid. Thus the movement on each of the two staircases is in one unchanging direction. Visitors go down the first, leave their wraps in the dressing-rooms below, take the second flight of steps up to the main hall, and all this time the staircase going straight from the vestibule to the main hall, which would be the obvious stair for ordinary use, is relieved from the pressure on special occasions. In addition, no one has had to flit, portentous in winter cloaks and galoches, across the hall and past crowded drawing-rooms. As the solution of a definite problem of social life, this entrance plan must appeal to any one, but to an architect it is a thing of pure gold. There is no difficulty so

MRS. CAMERON'S HOUSE.

great as that of making the entrance to a house more than a mere aperture in the wall, and architects rack their brains as to where their entrance hall shall leave off and their main hall begin. As for such a convenient method of gaining and leaving the dressing-rooms as the Boardman house illustrates, one may study a thousand plans and never find its rival.

Discussion of the Boardman house redirects attention to a point to which allusion has already been made. The building is in flawless taste. That is a tribute which one is constantly inspired to pay to the domestic architecture of Washington, and if the reader will stop to consider how rarely it can be paid to the dwellings of a whole city he will appreciate more keenly just what it means upon the present occasion. Mr. Boardman's house is one of great dignity, so simple, that, without any vines clambering over its tawny surfaces, without the blinds that are necessary in the summer time, it is severe to the point of austerity. But the design grows more impressive with slow scrutiny, and in the subtle lines of the swelling bays on the two façades fronting Eighteenth and P sts. respectively, in the delicate lines which denote the separation of the second from the first story, in the effective play of light and shade brought about by the loggia just beneath the cornice, in the excellent profile of the cornice itself—in all these things, and in the fine proportions of the whole, one recognizes an artistic building, an edifice capable of sustaining the weight of its almost bald simplicity. Time will modify its present severe aspect, but time is not needed to give it statelliness.

HOUSE OF MR. S. G. WARD.

With the massive Warder house, a stone structure of positive grandeur, this stands for the most imposing phase of that fastidious style of architecture which makes the streets of Washington a series of artistic pleasures.

It will have been observed that some of the most artistic touches in the domestic architecture of Washington are those, like the entrance to the Boardman house, which have their roots in actual needs. Life in the capital city is not so radically different from life elsewhere that houses possess invariably marked differences of plan, yet here and there one finds an interesting peculiarity. For example, the custom is to have all ashes removed by way of an alley running through every block, at the backs of the houses. The same custom prevails in other cities, notably Chicago, but in one case a Washington architect, Mr. Bibb, was not content to have the subordinate portion of the house he was designing left untouched by his art. He accepted the brick fence which hid the backyard from public view as material susceptible of decorative treatment. As one passes the corner on which the house stands, the brick wall running from the house back to the ashman's alley is seen to be broken in several places, as by depressions of say ten inches or a foot. The broken spaces are perhaps twenty-four inches in width. They are filled with iron grilles, the gateway at the end of the wall is handled in the same tactful way, and without any pretence a most prosaic detail in the scheme of the house is made permanently beautiful. In another case the house of Mr. Tuckerman, at Sixteenth and I sts., is provided with a considerable garden on its southern side, which is not the side of the street faced by the dwelling. The architects had the audacity to treat the rear façade somewhat as they treated the front one, and the good results of their daring are visible at once. The house lifts itself above the green inclosure in the heart of Washington, and at that point where one would expect blank brick walls, as a rule, one gets a hint of a manor that has grown old looking down in the sunshine upon a formal garden of many years ago. In the Adams house, where it was necessary to place the kitchen in the front, on the street floor, Mr. Richardson subordinated that humble apartment, and at the same time helped his design, by recessing the window under an arch, just as he recessed the door alluded to above; and, having done this, he stretched an iron grille across the entire width of the arch. No one would suspect the proximity of the kitchen, and when the location of that room is known the recession of the window, with the presence of the grille, brings the whole composition into harmony.

It is the harmonious character of the houses of Washington that makes them interesting and artistic, the constituents of a beautiful ensemble. To study them one by one is only to come back in the end to a broad survey of the whole fine gathering, and to conclude that they have been held together by a remarkably spontaneous and logical development of architectural art. They do not illustrate a style. But over the construction of them all there seems to have presided a spirit making for simplicity, good taste, a decorous enjoyment of the house as a work of art, combining the expression of personal feeling with deference to standards in vogue among a cultivated people. There is no striving for effect, there is none of the restlessness which belongs to the domestic architecture of so many American cities. The people who build houses here have no weakness for display, and it is impressive to realize that after a careful examination of the city the memory recalls few aggressive buildings. Those few are not characteristic. The typical house reveals its artistic merits unobtrusively, just as the typical painting or statue declares itself in a crowded gallery. Happily, moreover, Washington is not crowded in its architecture, nor does it seem likely to be for many years to come. The political life of America is focused here. Social life promises to be centralized in the same way for a certain portion of each year at least. But no expansion of the city, no matter how great, can be so rapid as to make the dominant people in the place forgetful of the serene traditions which fill the very air. Nothing is done in haste, and it is haste, it is an ill-considered decision, that does modern architecture most harm. Here, when a house is designed, there is an atmosphere of deliberation about it from the start. When that atmosphere has been absent the work has been bad. But it is rarely missed. To estimate with accuracy the merits of a city it is necessary to take it at its best, and in the matter of its house architecture to take Washington at its best is to judge it from the examples which are in the majority.

R. C.